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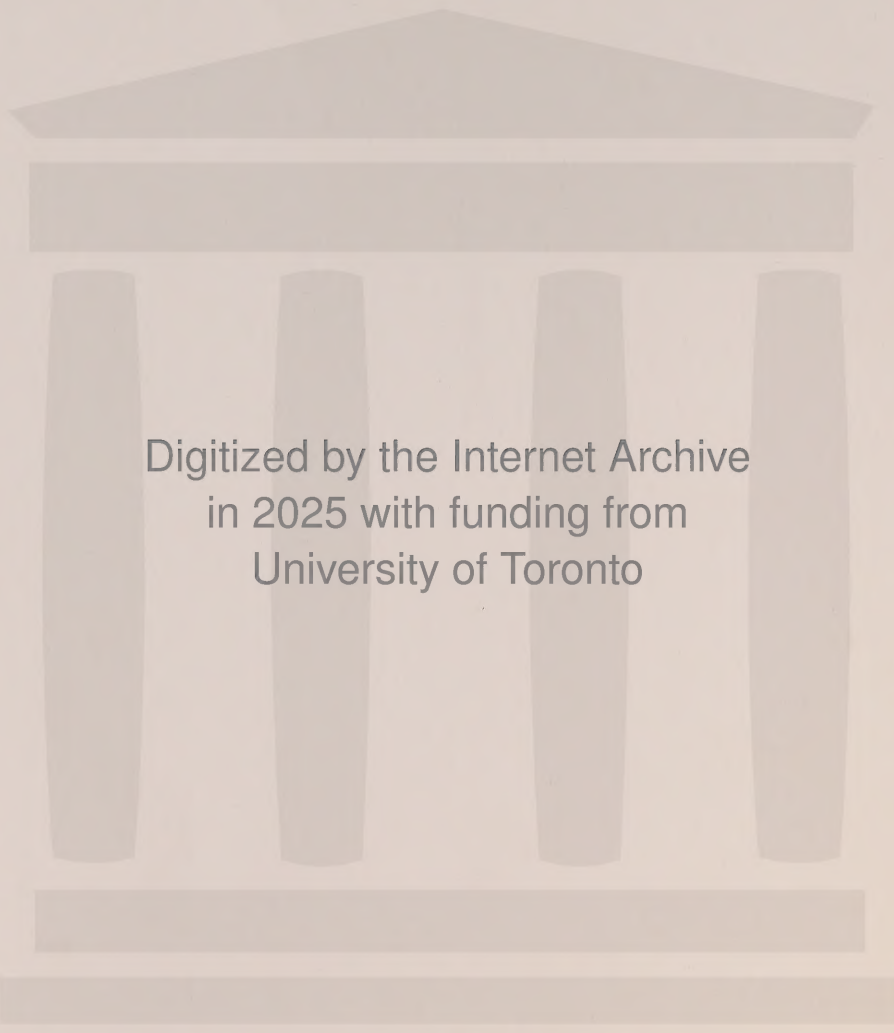
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English in the Intermediate Division: A survey of Teachers and Students

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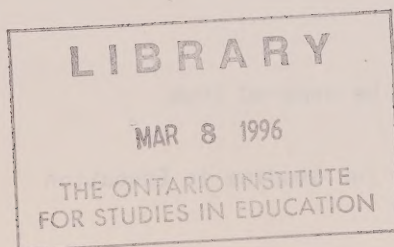
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English in the Intermediate Division: A survey of Teachers and Students

Leslie D. McLean



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English Subject Matter Group

The committee members listed below advised on aspects of the 1981 field trial. The final report, however, was the responsibility of the principal investigator and the project team.

Bruce Archer (Ontario Teachers' Federation)
Betty Chambers (North York Board of Education)
Roberta Charlesworth (North York Board of Education)
Jim Doris (Ministry of Education)
Helen Dunlop (Ministry of Education)
Peter Evans (OISE Field Centre)
Jerry George (Ministry of Education)
Mark Holmes (The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education)
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William Stratton (Etobicoke Board of Education)

Subject Advisory Group

The committee members listed below advised on development of the published pool: English I and II.

Betty Chambers (North York Board of Education)
Frank Fowler (Frontenac-Lennox and Addington County Roman Catholic Separate School Board)
Jerry George (Ministry of Education)
Don Gutteridge (University of Western Ontario)
Jean Hewitt (Federation of Women Teachers' Association of Ontario)
Paul Legge (Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association)
Frank McTeague (Board of Education for the Borough of York)

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The large, complex data-set could not have been entered into the computer, processed, and analysed without the special efforts of the staff in OISE's Computing Services Group. Tina Edwards, Jack Pledger, and many others gave of themselves well beyond the call of duty. Thanks are also due to the OISE Press for helping meet tight deadlines for printing the 106 different questionnaires and four newsletters.

The English Subject Matter Group advised on the conduct of the field trial. Moreover, it was helpful and tolerant as the project team worked its way through this first field trial in Ontario. Jim Doris, the ministry's Liaison Officer, a problem-solver, provided a valued and needed steady hand.

English in Grades 7 to 10: The Views of Ontario Teachers and Students

English is an important subject, students in Grades 7 to 10 say, and it is important to do well in it—to learn to write well and to learn how to listen. Their teachers report that poor motivation is not a primary cause of low achievement. These very positive findings emerged from a province-wide survey of students and teachers conducted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, in May 1981, in conjunction with the Ontario Assessment Instrument Pool (OAIP) field trials in English and mathematics.

The chief cause of low achievement, according to teachers, is that there are too many students in classes. Although elementary and secondary teachers held different views on some matters, on this point they were in strong agreement.¹ When asked to account for low achievement ("students don't achieve as much as you feel they should") teachers rated "too many students per class" as the most significant contributing factor.

A strong majority of English teachers (70 per cent) felt that the Intermediate English Program (as set out in provincial guidelines) was "about right over-all", disagreeing that it was "too ambitious". The other 30 per cent split between "too ambitious in general" and "too ambitious for some classes". The "timing and sequence of topics in the English program" scored lowest in the list of possible causes of low student achievement. These findings added up to an expression of general satisfaction with the way English teaching was organized and carried out in the Intermediate Division in Ontario in May 1981.

Canadian literature was regarded as of minor importance, testifying to the benign neglect that has been found so often in recent years. Almost one third of the teachers checked off "not at all" or "to a small extent" in rating the importance of the English program for developing "an appreciation of Canada's literary heritage". Only a third felt this objective was important to a significant extent or more. A hardy 5 per cent (30 out of 637) of the teachers felt it was important "to a great extent".

Students reflected similar attitudes and practice. They agreed very mildly (+2 on a scale from 0 to 37) that they should read more Canadian books, and disagreed a bit more strongly (-4.8) with the statement, "Lots of the reading we do in English class is about Canada." Disagreement was registered (at -10) to, "We read many stories about French Canada."

About the time of the Ontario survey, the British Columbia-based CANLIT research co-operative was conducting a national survey of courses in Canadian literature and use of Canadian books in schools.² Its conclusion was that Canadian literature still cannot get a foothold in Canadian schools. Ontario appears to be right in the mainstream in this regard.

Students and teachers responded to many questions (coincidentally, forty-two each) telling us something about themselves—for example, about their plans for completing secondary school, or whether English was their preferred teaching subject. The rest of this report summarizes these responses and provides more detail on the main points stated at the beginning. Readers might be interested in a companion report on the OAIP field trial, *Report of the 1981 Field Trials in English and Mathematics . . . Intermediate Division*, (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1982). This report is available at the Ontario Government Bookstore or through OISE's Publication Sales.

Ontario's Intermediate English Teachers: Experienced, Educated, Confident

The 1981 sample (637 teachers) reflected a now well-known pattern—few new teachers as enrolment declines, and many teachers for whom English is not their preferred teaching subject. Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the experience and the amount of post-secondary study done in English of the teachers in our random sample, as well as their teaching history and preference for English as a teaching subject.

Experience, Preference and First Teaching Subject

Preference is related to first teaching job, as one might expect; those who prefer English are more likely to start as English teachers (Table 1). Of more interest was the percentage of English teachers who neither started in English nor prefer teaching it (13 per cent). This percentage might be expected to rise in coming years—not an attractive prospect. One can either derive comfort from the finding that almost two thirds (380 teachers) prefer teaching English, or worry that more than one third (223 teachers) do not. Perhaps some record should be kept of the trend, especially in view of the pattern that emerges in Table 2.³

1. In this report, the terms "elementary" and "secondary" as applied to teachers indicate their membership in one or the other section (panel) of the teachers' federation or association. Teachers in Grades 7 and 8 often belong to the elementary panel, while teachers in Grades 9 and 10 will almost always belong to the secondary panel.

2. *Course Countdown 1973-1980: Canadian Literature in English Canadian High Schools*. Victoria, B.C.: CANLIT, 1982.

3. Number of responses varies from table to table because some teachers (about 5%) failed to respond to some items.

Table 1

Preference for English as a Teaching Subject by English as First Teaching Subject *

This table tells us that:

1. English is the preferred subject of 69 per cent of those who started teaching as an English teacher (left-hand column, lower right corner).
2. Thirteen per cent (81 teachers) who were teaching English in 1981 did not start teaching as an English teacher, nor is English their preferred subject (right-hand column, upper left corner).

		As a percentage of preferred teaching subject English preferred?		As a percentage of total sample English preferred?	
		NO	YES	NO	YES
English first teaching subject?	NO	56	44	13	10
	YES	31	69	24	53

* All tables in this report present results that have passed standard statistical tests; hence, repeated reference to statistical significance has been omitted. The data are available through the Ontario Educational Data Archive (Computing Services Group, OISE).

Table 2

Experience, First Subject, and Teaching Preference of Current English Teachers in Grades 7 to 10

This table tells us that:

1. Over half the sample had ten or more years of experience teaching English.
2. English was the first teaching subject for 85 per cent of senior teachers but not for 50 per cent of junior teachers.
3. More than half of current English teachers in the elementary panel (57 per cent) do not prefer to teach English; 22 per cent of English teachers in the secondary panel do not prefer to teach English.
4. Teachers with ten or more years of experience are more likely to get their preference.

Years of English teaching	English your <i>first</i> teaching subject? (per cent)		Cumulative per cent	English your <i>preferred</i> teaching subject? (per cent)			
	No	Yes		Elementary No	Yes	Secondary No	Yes
1-3 years	50	50	100	82	18	44	56
4-6 years	30	70	87	62	38	31	69
7-9 years	22	78	70	52	48	28	72
10+ years	15	85	56	50	50	14	86
Total per cent	26	74		57	43	22	78

The effect of declining enrolment on the teacher corps is seen in Table 2—over half the teachers have more than nine years’ experience, and 70 per cent have more than seven. The pattern is almost the same in the secondary and elementary divisions. One alarming feature of Table 2 is that 82 per cent of new elementary English teachers and 44 per cent of new secondary teachers do not prefer to teach English (right-hand table, top row).

Education

Over half the English teachers have a B.A. degree or more *in English*, but most of these are in the secondary panel (Table 3). Conversely, 13 per cent have not studied English at the post-secondary level; most of these are in the elementary panel. Still, a teacher corps in which 87 per cent have completed some post-secondary study of their subject probably ranks high in the world.⁴

Table 3
Canlit, Elelmentary vs. Secondary and Post-secondary English Study

<i>This table tells us that:</i>				
1. A quarter of English teachers in the elementary panel have degrees in English, and three quarters of secondary teachers do.				
2. Developing an appreciation of Canada’s literary heritage is more important to elementary teachers than to secondary teachers, but it is not a high priority for either group.				
	Post-secondary study in English by elementary and secondary teachers (per cent: N = 597)		Importance of developing an appreciation of Canada’s literary heritage (scale: 0 = 100)	
	<i>Elementary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Elementary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>
No post- secondary study	22	5	47.8	38.8
Some post secondary study	52	20	52.0*	36.3*
B.A. degree in English or more	26	75	47.1	40.0
Total per cent	100	100	Avg. 49.8	39.3
No. of teachers	264	333		

* This difference between elementary and secondary for teachers with some post-secondary study is significantly larger than the other differences.

4. Figures are hard to come by, but the level of education appears to make little difference. The IEA studies have consistently found no correlation between years of post-secondary study by teachers and achievement in English by students.

Confidence

No comprehensive study of the curriculum or the causes of low achievement was attempted, of course. Instead, teachers were asked to rate separately possible factors contributing to low achievement. These ratings were converted to a scale ranging from 0 (*Not at all*) to 100 (*To a great extent*). The seven factors and the average rating given by teachers are presented in Table 4. The concern over pupil-teacher ratio has already been mentioned, as has the confidence teachers have in their methods and their curriculum.

Table 4

Teachers' Rating of Factors Contributing to Lower Achievement than Expected

This table tells us that:

1. High pupil-teacher ratio tops the list of factors teachers say contribute to lower achievement than expected.
2. Student motivation is a factor, but not a great one.
3. Teachers are confident in their methods and their curriculum.

Factor	Rank	Rating	
Too many students per class	1	Significant	(62)
Low student motivation generally	1	Moderate	(52)
The teaching method	3	Some	(42)
Inappropriate teaching materials	4	Some	(39)
Not enough teaching materials (books, films, etc.)	5	Some	(37)
Timing and sequence of topics in the English program	6	Small	(23)
Too many students whose first language is not English *	7	Small	(22)

* Only 8 per cent of the student sample usually spoke a language other than English at home. Teachers with classes having many ESL students might well rank factor 7 higher, but this could not be determined in the 1981 survey.

More information on curriculum priorities was obtained by asking teachers to rate the importance (for example) of “allowing opportunities for students to gain classroom practice in editing their own writing” The six “opportunities” and the teachers’ ratings are listed in Table 5. Among the choices offered, the two referring to writing were rated highest and the use of dramatic activities was rated lowest (of the same ‘small importance’ as developing an appreciation for Canada’s literary heritage!).

Table 5

Teachers’ Ratings of the Importance of Six Activities in the Instructional Program

This table tells us that:

1. Writing is rated as more important than speaking, listening, Canadian literature, or dramatic activities.

2. Personal observation, experiences, ideas, and feelings are seen as very important resources for writing.

3. Small-group discussions are also regarded as important.

Rank	Rating		Activity allow opportunities for students to:
1	Very important	(76)*	develop and use personal observations, experiences, ideas, and feelings as resources for writing.
2	Important	(64)**	gain classroom practice in editing their own writing.
3	Important	(60)	develop powers of speaking and listening in small-group discussions.
4	Small-mod. importance	(53)	formulate questions of varying depth or range.
5	Small importance	(44)**	to develop an appreciation of Canada’s literary heritage.
6	Small importance	(41)	use formal or informal dramatic activities.

* Scale: 0 — No importance; 50 — Uncertain; 100 — Very great importance.

** Elementary teachers rated these two activities higher than secondary teachers, but not enough to change the rank.

Writing Instruction: Intermediate Teachers Present a Conservative Picture

Teachers mark students' writing even more in secondary than in elementary school. In doing so, they concentrate to a significant extent on over-all content rather than on such surface features as handwriting, spelling, and minor grammatical errors. They are thus following good, recommended practice. In other respects, however, these teachers' approaches are relatively "conservative".

Table 6

Teachers' Use of Six Techniques in the Teaching of Writing *

This table tells us that:

1. Teachers do evaluate students' writing, concentrating on content and coherence.
2. They make moderate to small use of techniques such as the writing folder, journal, and student evaluation of writing.

Teaching Technique	Extent of Use **	
Evaluate writing done by students.	Great	(81) + +
Concentrate on over-all content and coherence (rather than surface features) in evaluating writing done by students.	Significant	(68)
Have students evaluate own writing.	Moderate	(49)
Make use of writing folder.	Moderate	(48)
Have students keep a journal as part of class work.	Small to Mod.	(43)
Have students' writing evaluated by other students	Small to Mod.	(40)

* These six are a selection from the provincial review.

** Scale 0-100: "Not at all" to "Very great".

+ Secondary more than elementary (84 vs. 79).

+ + Elementary teachers more than secondary (53 vs. 46).

The ranking for "Make use of a writing folder" (Table 6, fourth ranked, rating of 48) provides an illustration of this point. A "writing folder" is a cumulative collection of their own compositions kept by students over a period of time and discussed with the teacher. Some (but not usually all) of these are marked by the teacher. The London Association for the Teaching of English (in England) rates the use of the writing folder highly in instruction and assessment.⁵ The Ontario curriculum guideline recommends it, and the published pool reinforces this recommendation.

Ontario teachers, however, estimate that the writing folder is used only to a moderate extent. Student journals and student evaluation of writing are apparently used even less. How do we square these findings with the "Very important" rating (76) given (Table 5) to allowing students to develop and use personal observations, experiences, ideas, and feelings as resources for writing?

5. *English Exams at 16—An analysis and some proposals for the future*. London, England: London Association for the Teaching of English, 1980.

Time Devoted to Reading, Writing, and Language Study: Wide Variation Reported

Teachers were asked the following question about each of reading, writing, and language study:

In your English class, the approximate amount of classroom time in an average week students spend on _____ is:

- ten minutes or less per week _____
- between 10 and 30 minutes per week _____
- half an hour to one hour per week _____
- one to two hours per week _____
- more than two hours per week _____

The responses were converted to number of hours per week by taking the mid-point of each alternative. Thus, if a teacher checked “one to two hours per week”, this was counted as 1.5; “more than two hours per week” was counted as 3.0; and “half an hour to one hour per week” as 0.75. In some tables, hours were converted to minutes simply by multiplying by 60.

As one might expect, elementary teachers reported spending more class time per week on reading, writing, and language study than secondary teachers. On average, elementary teachers reported that they spend a total of 4.4 hours per week on these three activities, and secondary teachers three hours (Table 7). The range of reports is surprisingly wide—from less than one hour to nine hours per week in both panels.

Unfortunately, some of the range is the result of mixing semestered schools with non-semestered schools. Through an oversight, no record was kept of which classes were on the semester system, and because of the safeguards built in to maintain confidentiality, it is not possible to recover this information. Thus, the reports on time spent teaching reading, writing, and language are difficult to interpret. It should be noted, however, that among teachers who belong to the elementary panel—few of whom would be teaching in semestered schools—the range is very wide. We do know as well that only 25 per cent of Grade 9 and 30 per cent of Grade 10 classes were semestered. Thus, the range is also very wide among non-semestered classes in secondary schools.

Table 7

Time Spent on Reading, Writing, and Language Study by Elementary and Secondary Teachers

This table tells us that:

1. Teachers in the elementary panel report spending more time on reading, writing, and language study than secondary teachers do.
2. Secondary teachers report spending a higher *percentage* of time on writing than elementary teachers do.

		Elementary	Secondary
Minutes per week	Reading	107	69
	Writing	82	66
	Language	75	44
Percentage of reported time	Reading	41	39
	Writing	32	38
	Language	27	24

What are we to make of this wide range? Statisticians have developed a graphic way of presenting such a situation—the “Box-and Whisker Plot” (Figure 1). Its purpose is to concentrate attention on the centre, not on the extremes, defining the centre as the middle 50 per cent of teacher responses. The belief is that these are the most stable, representative responses. In Figure 1, the “box” is drawn to mark the middle 50 per cent of responses—from 100 to 225 for secondary schools, for example. Lines (the “whiskers”) are drawn out from the box to mark the ranges of the upper and lower 25 per cent. Isolated, extreme responses are marked by a circled asterisk (*).

What Figure 1 tells us is that the time teachers report devoting to reading, writing, and language study varies at least from 175 to 310 minutes per week, *from class to class*, on a regular basis. Twenty-five per cent of teachers in the elementary panel reported five hours of instruction or more per week and 25 per cent reported three hours of instruction per week or less. A two-hour difference per week is about the equivalent of an extra twelve days of full-time school. A difference this large might partially explain some of the large differences in achievement from class to class but, because of the design of the survey, it is not possible to determine definitely what correlation, if any, there is between these time estimates and pupil achievement.

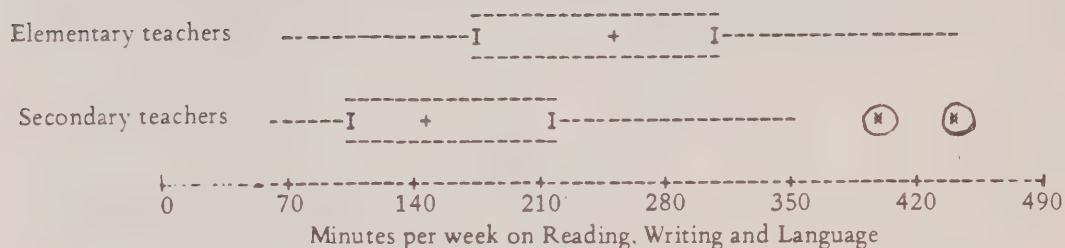


Figure 1. Ranges of total number of minutes per week that elementary and secondary teachers reported spending on reading, writing, and language study in their classrooms. As marked by the crosses (+), half the elementary teachers reported spending 259 or more minutes per week, and half the secondary teachers 158 or more minutes per week. Responses were received from 238 elementary and 313 secondary teachers.

Possible Consequences of Differences

Although amount of instructional time has been shown to be a powerful prediction of school achievement in general, there is considerable dispute over the effect of time spent on any particular activity.⁶ What may not have been clear before this survey is just how much difference there is among English teachers in the time they spend in class on reading, writing, and language. Before drawing any definite conclusions from this information, we would have to define terms more carefully and verify some of our figures.

Student performance on instruments included in the 1981 field trial did not suggest that it would be particularly illuminating to focus on differences of the order of 12 days.⁷ The clear message from the field trial is that achievement on some of the OAIP materials changes very little from the end of Grade 7 to the end of Grade 10. Viewed in relation to this finding the variation reported by teachers seems insignificant.

Adequacy of Resources to Aid Teaching

In response to both general and specific questions, teachers expressed satisfaction with the materials available to them. New teachers (one to three years of experience) rated them as barely adequate, but the rating increased with number of years' experience. Since it takes a few years to consolidate one's teaching and collect adequate materials, this result is not surprising. Teachers certainly did not report lack of A-V equipment, books, and the like.

Materials Produced by Boards

In response to the statement, "Written materials produced by my Board for English Language Arts are ...", teachers were asked to circle one of: "None", "Few", or "Numerous"; and also one of: "Not useful", "Of some use", or "Very useful". On average, such materials were found to be (a) "Few", and (b) "Of some use". About 7 per cent of elementary and 15 per cent of secondary teachers chose "None" and "Not useful".

Materials Produced by the Ministry

Teachers were asked to evaluate three curriculum documents: *Language Across the Curriculum*, *Reading*, and *Evaluation and the English Program*. One question was designed to determine degrees of teachers' familiarity with the materials—e.g., "Unknown", "Read", "Read and Used". In addition, they were asked to indicate whether the materials were "Not useful", "Of some use", or "Very useful".

On average, all three had been "Read" and were "Of some use". Heads of English tended to mark "Read and Used" and "Very useful", and there was generally more use with more years of experience. *Language Across the Curriculum* had a slight edge in the ratings.

Assessment of Student Responses

Teachers who face classes full of teenagers each school day might be sceptical of the picture students presented in the 1981 survey. In no uncertain terms the students expressed the view that English is important, that they want to do well in it, and that their parents want them to do well. They agreed with the positive statements and disagreed with the negative ones in an entirely consistent pattern. Fewer than 4 per cent plan to leave school before completing at least Grade 12.

A total of 3897 students answered questionnaires. Forty-two attitude items of the agree-disagree form were distributed over four forms in such a way that about 1950 responses were obtained to each one, the questions being presented in four different groups of twenty-one. All students answered a few questions about themselves.

Shift in Upper Grades to Plans for Grade 12 Diploma

From Grade 7 to Grade 10, students' plans exhibit a steady shift away from Grade 13 and towards Grade 12 completion. Except for a slight increase among males, however, the proportion of students planning to leave school before completing Grade 12 remains low. The percentages within each grade are given in Table 8. The same table also reveals a sharp shift in plans in Grade 9, a change which is especially obvious among males.

6. Fisher, C. et. al. Improving teaching by increasing 'academic learning time'. *Educational Leadership*, 1979, 37(1), 52-54. Also Frederick, W. and Walberg, H. Learning as a function of time. *J. Educ. Res.*, 1980, 73,(4), 183-204.

7. Reported in Leslie D. McLean, *Report of the 1981 Field Trials in English and Mathematics... Intermediate Division*. Ministry of Education, 1982.

Table 8

Description of English Student Sample Who Responded to the Attitude Survey in May 1981
Percentage of Students by Grade for Females and Males

This table tells us that:

1. The percentage of students planning to complete Grade 13 declines steadily through the grades, shifting to Grade 12 completion.
2. Males show a sharp reversal between Grade 8 and Grade 9, the majority shifting away from Grade 13 completion, and more males than females planning not to complete Grade 12.

Females (1919) Plans to Complete School				Males (1942) Plans to Complete School		
Complete Grade 13	Complete Grade 12	Not Complete Grade 12		Complete Grade 13	Complete Grade 12	Not Complete Grade 12
82	17	01	Grade 7 (1143)	73	23	04
70	28	02	Grade 8 (1322)	64	34	02
54	42	04	Grade 9 (690)	44	50	06
42	54	04	Grade 10 (706)	37	56	07

By May of their Grade 9 year, most of these fourteen- or fifteen-year-old students had one month remaining of their first year in secondary school. The year is likely to have been a turbulent one, and many who had planned to stay in school through Grade 13 began to change their minds. The economic conditions in 1981 may also have influenced some of these young people to opt for what they perceived as a more direct route to jobs. This pattern was even sharper in responses from students in Grade 9 mathematics classes, but in these same classes there was a rebound among Grade 10 students towards plans for Grade 13 completion.⁸

The Attitude Scale: Attaching Numbers to Feelings

The statements were presented to the students as follows:

Here are twenty-one statements about English in school. Please circle the words below each statement to say whether you agree or do not agree. There are no right or wrong answers. No one will know how you marked your paper. Your answers are important.

I enjoy reading.

Very much disagree Disagree Don't know Agree Very much agree

Numbers were assigned to each of the five choices. "Don't know" was assigned zero; "Agree", +10; "Disagree", -10; and the extremes, +37, or -37. Thus, an average value near zero means the students were undecided—some agreed, some disagreed. It is well known that respondents to such surveys tend to avoid the extremes, so a value of +10 should be interpreted as strong agreement.

8. Reported in McLean, Leslie D., *Willing But Not Enthusiastic: Students' Views on Mathematics, Calculators, and Computers in Grades 7 to 10*, available from the Ontario Government Bookstore and OISE Publications Sales.

Thus, any average higher than +10 (or lower than -10) indicates that students had quite strong feelings. The over-all average for “I enjoy reading”, for example, was 5.0—moderate agreement; but females (5.9) responded differently from males (4.1), and the Advanced classes (6.3) agreed more than the General or Basic classes (3.7). The pattern of responses to “I enjoy reading” was the most complicated, in that there were several differences among groups. Students responded to most statements in a fairly uniform way. The few exceptions are noted in the text or the tables.

Consider the statement, “There is no need to learn to write well unless you are going to university.” Students responded with a resounding disagreement (-15.9), the only complication being that females disagreed more (-17.7) and males less (-14.1) (these differences are small in the over-all picture; the important point is what the numbers mean):

- Strong feelings*
 - Strong agreement — positive (+), larger than 10
 - Strong disagreement — negative (-), larger than 10
- Moderate to strong feelings*
 - Agreement — positive, 2 to 10
 - Disagreement — negative, -10 to -2
- Undecided*
 - Don't know — positive, 0 to 2
 - negative, -2 to 0

The Importance of English: Strong Positive Feelings

The statement cited above—“There is no need to learn to write well unless you are going to university” was one of three statements that sparked strong reactions from students. The statement “It is important to learn how to listen” also received strong agreement (14.1). Agreement at 9.4 was registered to, “Everyone should do well in English.” Responses to ten statements on the importance of English are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9
Student Feelings on the Importance of English

<i>This table tells us that:</i>		
1. Students feel strongly that everyone needs to learn to write well and to listen.		
2. English is perceived as useful both in school and for getting a better job.		
3. A majority of students say they will continue to take English even if it is not required.		
4. Other subjects are also important to students.		
Statement	Rank	Rating *
There is no need to learn how to write well unless you are going to university.	1	-15.9
It is important to learn how to listen.	2	14.1
Everyone should do well in English.	3	9.4
Doing well in English will help me get a better job.	4	8.5
I will drop English as soon as I can.	5	-7.3
Studying English helps me to be a better reader.	6	5.9
I enjoy English more than history.	7	2.3
English is the most important subject in school.	8	1.2
I enjoy mathematics more than English.	9	0.5
Studying poetry is a waste of time.	10	0.3

* Positive — agree; negative — disagree; 0 2 — undecided.

Student Motivation: Positive

Three statements dealt directly with individual student motivation, and all three received hearty agreement.

I really want to do well in English. (15.9)

My parents really want me to do well in English. (11.1)

Everyone should do well in English. (9.4)

As we shall see, this level of agreement was very high indeed, for an *average*. Teachers seemed to recognize this when they said that lack of motivation was only a moderate contributing factor when student achievement was lower than it should be.

Student Attitudes to Reading: Positive

The over-all agreement with "I enjoy reading" has already been noted. We were able to relate student attitudes to student performance on six reading passages, and it was found that students who agreed more with "I enjoy reading" tended to do better on the reading passages (correlation +0.3).

"Reading helps me think about things in a new way" drew firm agreement (6.0), as did "There are a lot of books I want to read" (4.0). Just to keep a perspective on the world of 1981, we also presented, "I prefer watching the news on television rather than reading it in the newspaper", a statement with which many adults agree. Students gave it a 2.1, and their response was *negatively* correlated with reading scores (i.e., the higher the preference for television the lower the reading score).

Written Work: More Student "Say" in Choice of Topics

We have already seen that students feel everyone should learn to write well (not just those going on to university). They gave strong endorsement (9.5) to "I write best when I choose my own topic." On the other hand, students neither agreed nor disagreed strongly with "I write best when my teacher gives me a topic to write on" (1.9). Some students prefer to be assigned a topic, no doubt, and others do not have strong feelings.

Teachers gave the highest priority to the development and use of personal observations, experiences, ideas, and feelings as resources for writing, and second priority to classroom practice in editing (the students' own) written work. Students agree that "writing in class is worthwhile" (4.3). "I learn a lot by going over and revising my own writing" got a 3.1 rating. The negative statement "We have too much writing to do in English" split the students, and drew an average of -1.5 (undecided). Just as with "I prefer watching the news on television rather than reading it in the newspaper", those who felt they had too much writing to do tended to get lower scores on the achievement tests.

Two statements to which males and females responded quite differently were: "I avoid writing letters" (-1.7 over-all); and "I like to write in my diary" (-7.1). In both cases, females disagreed less (only -4.1 for the diary and -0.1 for letters). Males and females both disagreed with one statement: "I would like to have a job as a writer" (-9.1).

Canadian Content: A Non-Issue?

The best one can say about attitudes to Canadian content is that students are mildly for it in places and not against it anywhere. Consider the rather bald statement, "We should read more Canadian books instead of so many American or British books." Subtle it is not. Students respond with a marginal 2.6. Those who felt we *should* read more Canadian books tended to get higher reading scores—but lower spelling scores.

How much Canadian content is there? Not a lot, according to students. "Lots of the reading we do in English class is about Canada" is politely but firmly disagreed with (-3.9). French Canada fares no better, apparently, since "Our English books hardly ever have stories or poems about French Canada" is agreed to (3.3), and "We read many stories about French Canada" draws strong disagreement (-10).

Canada's native peoples were not forgotten, at least not by the researchers, and an interesting result emerged. Students were asked to agree or disagree with "We should read more about Indians and Innuit." On average, students disagreed (-4.5), but males disagreed less. Coincidentally, one of the six reading passages from the field trial was entitled "Innuit". There were six questions about the Innuit passage and, sure enough, students who disagreed less that we should read more about Indians and Innuit scored better than those who disagreed more. We are not sure whether this says more about reading or about attitudes, but it does suggest that students were thinking when they filled in the questionnaires.

Films and Discussions, or Reading Aloud? Student Preferences

Among twelve statements about different topics and class activities, only films provoked strong feelings. Students agreed with "I like to have films in English class" (8.7), and also nodded slightly to "We should see more television programs in English class" (2.9). Males were even more in agreement than females, and there was an interesting link to the achievement scores. Those who thought that they should see more television programs in English class were more likely to get the more difficult reading questions wrong.

Students refused to commit themselves when it came to grammar and spelling, or poetry. They were undecided in response to "We should spend more time on grammar and spelling" (-0.3). Those who agreed to the statement may have been right; they tended to score lower on the spelling and language tests. Teachers might consider it a victory that students failed to agree with "Studying poetry is a waste of time" (-0.3).

"I like discussions best of all in English class" drew firm agreement—on average (4.1). Moreover, "Working in small groups is the best way to learn" also gained approval (3.4). It should be recalled that the teachers gave high priority to developing students' powers of speaking and listening in small-group discussions (Table 5)—it would appear that students and teachers are on the same wavelength in this regard. When it came to homework assignments, there was no consensus. The average response to "I would rather work on English assignments alone instead of in a group" was exactly zero.

Teachers gave the lowest priority to the use of formal and informal dramatic activities in class, and students concurred, at least in part. They disagreed (-3.3) with "I like to read aloud in class." They don't mind reading plays, apparently, since "Reading a play makes me want to see it on the stage" just barely gained agreement (2.0). This borderline average is misleading, however, since females agreed at 3.1, while males were on the disagreement side of zero at -1.0. It appears that no one cares very much about plays and dramatic activities, one way or the other.

Gleanings

The importance of English in the school curriculum has been reaffirmed several times recently. Students agreed strongly that it was important to do well, that their parents wanted them to do well and that this was so whether one were going to university or not. In response to the Secondary Education Review Project, the Minister of Education announced that there will be one graduation diploma, for which 30 credits will be required, 5 of them English.⁹ A poll of Ontarians 18 years of age and older ranked "English and math skills learned at school" in a tie for the most important skills needed to do their job.¹⁰ There are few aspects of education about which there is such consensus.

There is also considerable agreement among experts how to go about teaching this important subject and on some ways to assess student achievement, but the dissemination of these ideas is still far from complete. The English OAIP, the field trial and the survey have brought some of the issues into sharper focus and should stimulate useful discussion. The teaching and assessing of students' writing provides a good example, as illustrated by the introductory paragraph of the "Writing" section of the English OAIP.

WRITING

Although the curriculum guideline stresses the importance of an integrated balance of the various components of the English program, public concerns often focus on the ability of students to write and the effectiveness of the writing program.

One reason is that writing often provides the synthesis or completion of a unit of work—what has been read about, talked about, studied or analysed finally comes down to a written composition, or report, or examination. The best evidence in many subjects of students' achievement is found in writing of some sort. A second reason is that writing provides a permanent and portable record in a way that any internal reflection or oral explication cannot.

As a premium is placed upon effective writing, teachers of English have a responsibility to encourage writing and to provide a program that supports the best possible growth. They also need a range of assessment methods that provide valid and reliable information about writing development and about the effectiveness of the program. (English I, p. W-1)

9. The Renewal of Secondary Education. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982.

10. Livingston, D.W., Hart, D.J. and McLean, L.D. *Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario 1982. Fourth OISE Survey.* Toronto: OISE, 1983, p. 46.

Following this passage is an excellent discussion of the difficulties in assessing writing with stress on the need to assess a reasonable selection of writing in various modes. The committee of teachers and consultants who prepared the English OAIP also wrote, "Any fair assessment must include samples of the student's writing over time, and this implies a writing folder, or portfolio, with records concerning performances" (*ibid*, p. W-3). There are detailed instructions how to prepare and use writing folders, and a long section on ways to score compositions. There is broad agreement among the specialists on the centrality of writing in the English program and on ways to assess the results. What about the classroom teachers?

Over 80 per cent of teachers reported spending 30 minutes to two hours per week on writing, and 85 per cent reported that they evaluate students writing to a significant extent. Half the teachers, however, use the writing folder only to a small extent. Teaching writing (and reading and language usage) puts heavy responsibility on the teacher, and a possible concern emerges from the number of teachers who started teaching English recently but for whom English is not their preferred teaching subject. It appears that there is some way to go before the model of teaching suggested in the intermediate guideline and in the OAIP is widely adopted.

And what use is to be made of the thousands of language usage instruments (English II, pp. L1-L165), many calling for the combination of sentences and other very short writing tasks? They are not to be used in isolation from the writing program, the experts warn, but there are few suggestions just how they are to be used. The direct teaching of spelling words and grammar is discouraged, in favour of activities that teach the points as the students learn to express their own ideas.

It was encouraging therefore to find among the field trial results that students made fewer errors in their own writing than on isolated exercises and that the holistic scores given to student compositions did increase over the grades from 7 to 10. Improvement over the grades was slight in writing, however, and almost non-existent on the reading and language usage instruments.¹¹ Some have suggested that there is still much traditional grammar teaching going on in intermediate English classes. If there is, then there is no evidence that it is effective. The evidence does suggest that there is no cause for alarm. When compared with results from other provinces and countries, the performance of Ontario students is seen to be right in line—neither greatly better nor worse.

What does emerge is a picture of a system in flux. Objectives are being changed and refined and emphasis is shifting from discrete point teaching to work on the improvement of performance (reading and writing, speaking and listening). To these, the category "Thinking" has been added, in recognition of the impossibility of separating language from thought. It is a vital, desirable flux that puts heavy demands on teachers and highlights the importance of and need for continuing professional development.

11. Reported in Leslie D. McLean, *Report of the 1981 Field Trials in English and Mathematics . . . Intermediate Division*.

